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ABSTRACT

The role of the State Library Association in developing continuing education opportunities for librarians is discussed. Library standards usually specify a trained and competent staff; to maintain appropriate levels requires a well organized continuing education program. The return of librarians to higher education is not advocated, but a concern is expressed for their attendance at institutes, workshops, and seminars. The State Library Association can sponsor programs to provide a way in which current knowledge and skills can be brought up-to-date. Suggested topics that could be discussed at such programs are enumerated. (Author/JPF)

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STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR LIBRARIANS

by

Gerard B. McCabe

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Standards for Effective Library and Information Service

And Continuing Education for Librarians

Several efforts have been underway in the last several months and years to revise library standards for particular categories of libraries. As proper to their spheres of interest certain divisions of the American Library Association, the Virginia Library Association, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools have been working to revise their standards for Academic and Public Libraries. Surely, professional associations in other parts of our country have been doing the same thing and the reasons for it are very understandable. As our society develops the needs of our patrons change and standards must change to meet new requirements. Due to the rapidity of change the standards of only five or ten years ago often become obsolete. Library standards are an attempt to codify guidelines for libraries. The idea is to provide a norm for quality at some level, a basis for comparison perhaps, and a measure of adequacy based on current understanding of what library requirements are. Typically, the usual guidelines include criteria for holdings, budgeting and growth, for library facilities and for specific services.

At this time I do not propose to review any specific library standards. I will say this, however, to be practical standards must be well reasoned and realistic in the sense of being achievable. When this

is the case, we certainly should support and insist on their application. Now, turning to my primary concern, I am going to paraphrase two short statements taken from the revised Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools Standards: "The Library is important in the achievement of educational goals. To serve the user well each library must have basic resources. Such resources should be available in a well equipped facility which will encourage maximum utilization by the community. Moreover, to facilitate use of such resources a competent professional staff should be available to assist the users. The selection, development and retention of library personnel have a direct bearing on the Library's success in achieving its objectives. The number of library personnel and the competencies to be possessed must be based upon the specific objectives which have been established for the library". Let's take a look at one key phrase concerning the competent professional staff. The library staff should be composed of people with the requisite abilities and should consist of a group of well trained librarians and supporting staff who are well trained. A qualified and well trained staff make possible the realization of library objectives. This is the key to successful application of library standards.

Usually compilations of standards for libraries contain some statement of a minimum requirement for professional librarians. Occasionally, some include a requirement for funding of conference attendance, but

beyond that nothing is said or perhaps shouldn't be. The object of this talk is the further development of librarians, their advancement, and self improvement through continuing education.

In advocating Continuing Education, I am not suggesting periodic returns to Higher Education as elementary and secondary school teachers do, but I am expressing a concern for occasional attendance at institutes, workshops and seminars. This method provides an accessible and obvious way in which current knowledge and current skills can be brought up-to-date. Through its several components the Association can sponsor continuing education programs such as I have mentioned and assist us all in keeping current and maintaining our competence.

A strong continuing education program impacts directly on effective library and information service, because those who provide the service are more knowledgable and confident. For this effect to occur all the continuing education programs must be thorough and well organized. These qualities can be imparted by a strong VLA effort. Some of my colleagues have attended seminars and workshops, and from time to time have reported back to me that a particular one they attended was lacking in these characteristics. If the State Library Association takes a very strong overview of such offerings this can be resolved very quickly.

Librarianship has a very viable literature. We are a well-informed profession, but occasionally we all need hands-on training in some new technique, or we need some concentrated effort in learning about new systems, such as, a Program Planning Budgeting System. Just yesterday I attended a State Library sponosored seminar on this subject. The Virginia State Library does an excellent job in assisting librarians around the Commonwealth with continuing education. Perhaps there is no way for normal standards to express this need and it is in a sense an unwritten requirement. Here are a number of topics in which workshops in some cases are being conducted currently in places around the country and should be of interest here in Virginia: (1) As I just noted, Program Planning Budgeting Systems, and possibly, Zero Based Budgeting - a term that we are going to hear more and more about in the coming months. (2) Cataloging - Via Computer Terminals. It is true that the Ohio College Library Center has been with us for quite awhile now, but not all of us in Virginia have been affected by it, and certainly we still need some additional training and understanding. (3) Computer Literature Searching - Some Virginia libraries use the New York Times Information Bank while others use the Lockheed Dialog System or The SDS System and perhaps some participate in one of the Health Sciences Networks such as the National Library of Medicine's Biomedical

Communications Network. (4) Another application is the conducting of Interlibrary Loan by use of terminals. (5) Serials Check-In - The recording of our serials holdings via a computer terminal and the current accessions of our daily receipts on terminals. (6) Acquisition work - Ordering over a terminal. (7) The use of microform materials in libraries is another worthwhile topic and I am sure you can think of others. There are many that are worthwhile.

Not all of us are affected or will be affected immediately by these new ideas or new procedures but in the future many of us will be. In the case of computer terminals it is not a matter of each librarian learning to operate this equipment though some will. It is important though that all of us have an understanding of the real potential of computer application and their capabilities. We need to know exactly what it is that can be done and what it will save in terms of cost after the initial investment, so that we can have an ease and familiarity with these new systems as they develop and as they impact on our libraries in our day to day operation. No matter how small the library in which we are employed sooner or later we will be affected by this change. What we have seen so far is just the tip of the iceberg. In the next few years we can look forward to a much more substantial commitment to automation than we see at the present time. We will read about these new ideas and we will need to increase our skill and understanding so that we will gain in proficiency as these things come into reality.

Effective library and information service does cost money. Obviously, salaries must be paid and other expenses met. Is a Continuing Education Program going to add to that cost? Of course, it will. Then what benefits can be gained by advocating an expansion of continuing education programs? The first result is a better trained staff and, therefore, a more competent staff - a staff which is well informed, knowledgeable and which provides better service to patrons. The well informed or well trained librarian does not fumble when specialized or difficult questions are raised, or when decisions must be made especially concerning the introduction of new services. The well trained librarian is in a better position to make reasoned intelligent decisions. The librarian will understand exactly what the advantages will be of any change, and decide which side of the question is the correct alternative to follow in a given library situation.

We don't have time to waste on continuing education programs that are not well organized and thorough. We must spend wisely, we must get a return on our investment, we must select these continuing education activities carefully. At this time I dare say the quality does vary noticeably. Again, that's why a coordinated VLA effort would be most helpful. It is in the best interest of the librarians and of our association to see to it that this is the case and that all of us will benefit. This is my recommendation - That VLA's Officers charge its various divisions with identifying the continuing education needs of their members and then

arrange a coordinated effort to provide continuing education opportunities for the membership. These programs need not necessarily be on a divisional basis. As I just witnessed, a PPBS Presentation can be the same for School, Public and Academic Librarians.

In this way VLA will assist by providing a way for us to remain competent and to continue to provide effective library and information service.